1: Jenness--91
847

(1913-16) 1922

Copper Eskimo

"Even children are regarded in some respects as the property of their parents. It is the parents, for example, who decide whether a newly-born babe shall be reared or not. If it is cast out alive another couple may recover it and rear it as their own child without payment, the parents having lost all claim; but in all ordinary cases of adoption the parents must be compensated before they will relinquish their rights."

1: Jenness--165-166 (1913-16) 1922 Copper Eskimo
116, 847

"Often the parents are unwilling to rear their children, for a baby involves much hardship to the mother, especially in the summer when all the household goods are packed on the back. The child is only an additional burden to the mother up to the age when it can make a long day's journey on its own feet; she has to carry it on her back over and above her full share of the household effects. Moreover, since the diet of the natives is confined to meat and fish, she must suckle the infant up to three or four years, and sometimes even to five. Nik, the wife of Aksiatak, was still occasionally suckling her son Nakitok, though the boy was certainly five years old and she had a baby of two or three months. It is little wonder therefore if the younger women in particular refuse to rear some of their children. Sometimes another family will adopt the babe, though more usually it is an older child that is adopted, since the new-born infant requires its mother's milk. Early in 1914 Higilak arranged to adopt the little daughter of a man named Wikkiak, whose wife was then on the eve of giving birth to another child; the parents received a pot and a knife as the [166] price of the adoption. After the baby was born, however, they decided to keep all their children, and rather unscrupulously went back on the agreement without restoring either of the articles, the pot or the knife."

1: Jenness--166
116, 847

(1913-16) 1922

Copper Eskimo

"Frequently the parents settle their problem by simply suffocating their baby and throwing it away. Even a mother will do this, for apparently she has no spontaneous affection for her offspring at the time that it is born. In the autumn of 1915 a Pinganngaktok native travelled westward with his wife and joined the Dolphin and Union strait natives at the Liston and Sutton islands. There, on January 22, the woman gave birth to a girl. Neither of the parents wanted to have any children at the time, for their companions were intending to return to Tree river the following day. They were both young still, they said, and in all probability would have at least one more child later, a boy perhaps who could take care of them when they grew old. The woman therefore suffocated her child and laid it out on the ground a few yards from the camp, where it was soon covered by the drifting snow. Only a year or two previously this couple had similarly exposed another little girl baby. There were three other cases of infanticide that winter in the vicinity of our station, more than the average number, probably, owing to the severity of the weather at this time and the shortage of food. One woman exposed a child about three years old; it was bewitched, she said, and only a burden to her. The child was probably defective, for, though it had grown in size, it had not developed properly and could neither stand alone nor walk."

1: Jenness--166-167 (1903-16) 1922 Copper Eskimo
116, 847

"Where twins are born one at least must either be killed or given away, for an Eskimo woman cannot possibly rear both children at the same time. If one is a boy and the other a girl, it is invariably the girl that is made the victim. Boys, in fact, are seldom exposed, for they will support their parents when they grow up. The utmost callousness is displayed in the matter. One woman laughed over a baby girl she had killed two or three years before, and [167] said that it had provided the foxes with a good meal. Very rarely some other woman in the settlement takes pity on the helpless infant; thus, when a Dolphin and Union strait woman named Keyuk exposed her baby without first suffocating it, another woman rescued it and reared it as her own child. The mother seems to forfeit all claim to it in such cases even when the child grows up. One thing these natives have to their credit, however -- they never resort to prenatal infanticide; I am not sure whether it is known even, although a native who quarrelled with his wife when she was pregnant threw her down in the snow and rolled his foot on her stomach."

2: Stefansson--131 (1908-12) 1914 Copper Eskimo
116, 731, 847

"Of the exposing of babies we have learned nothing direct. Among the Akuliakattagmiut the proportion of the sexes leads one to suppose that the exposing of female children is practised. We found here ten women of marriageable age as against nineteen men. In all other groups the men are more numerous than the women, the difference is nowhere else so great as at Cape Bexley.

To whatever extent the abandonment of the aged and the exposing of children does exist, it may be considered a direct result of the scarcity of food, for it is found rarely or not at all in such prosperous, well-fed communities as those of Cape Smythe (Point Barrow) and the Mackenzie Delta, while among all inlanders it is so common as to scarcely induce comment."

13: Jenness--89
116, 847

(1914-1916) 1917

Copper Eskimo

"Infanticide is frequent; four cases occurred in Dolphin and Union Strait in the winter of 1915-16. One of twins is always killed; the girl, if the sexes are different. Usually the child is suffocated before it is exposed. On the other hand, abortion is unknown. The chief reason for infanticide seems to be that the bringing up a child entails severe hardship on the mother; not only must she nurse it for several years until it is able to endure the strong meat and fish diet which constitutes the only food, but must carry it everywhere on her back, in addition to a heavy pack, through all their migratory summer life. The child is spared, however, if someone can be found to adopt it, and adoption is frequent."

29: Jenness E-5 (1914-1916) 1959
ND8 Copper Eskimo ND8

grinning in the background. I congratulated him; he *was* a great medicine-man. And later I changed his own .44 rifle for a 30.30.

A woman who entered Ikpuck's hut about 4 A.M. one morning, announced that his half-niece had just given birth to a daughter. Icehouse dressed quickly and went over to visit the mother; but Ikpuck, after the first enquiries, paid no further attention. A boy would have augmented the ranks of the hunters; but a girl, well, she was only one more to support. I, too, gave the matter no thought, leaving at daybreak to return to the station. But the day following the newly delivered wife and her husband marched across the strait in the teeth of a blizzard and built a snow-hut beside us. The baby remained behind. It had come at an inopportune season when the parents were migrating to the eastward; so without a pang they had crushed out its little life and laid the body on the wind-swept snow.

Four other mothers destroyed their babes this winter within an hour of delivery. Terrible as their crime may seem, they should not be condemned too hastily. Every society has devised some method, conscious or unconscious, for checking the full and unrestricted growth of its population; and infanticide, the simplest of them all, was in past ages the most widely spread. Greece and Rome condoned it, and even

29: Jenness E-5 (1914-1916) 1959
ND8 Copper Eskimo ND8

Christianity with its emphasis on the value of the individual soul has failed to eradicate it entirely in civilized countries. The Eskimos knew nothing of obstetrics or "child welfare," nothing of any branch of medicine; and the mother received little consideration, according to our standards, before and after her child was born. Instead of resting quietly at home, relieved of her heaviest duties and concentrating on the care of her babe, she performed all her usual tasks up to the moment of parturition, and resumed them within a few hours of delivery. Until the child gained strength to walk alone she carried it everywhere on her back, from morning till night, except when a brief respite from work permitted her to lay it among the bed-skins and personally watch over its safety; the ravenous dogs would make short shrift of an infant left unguarded within the hut or tent. On long winter marches she sometimes wrapped it in warm caribou robes and lashed it on top of the sled; but in summer it rode on her back-pack, which was not lightened in any way to compensate for the additional load. Then there was its food. Cow's milk and cereals did not exist for these Eskimos, and no babe could survive on fish and flesh, the only foods the country yielded. When the child began to walk it might swallow a morsel or two of seal or caribou meat well masticated by the parents, but for three years and even longer

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the mother furnished its nourishment from her own breast. Can we blame her if sometimes she shrank from the burden? Often she had no choice. It was physically impossible for her to raise twins, or children born within two years of one another; and there were no hospitals or infants' homes to which she could turn for aid. Surely it was kinder to stifle the infant in its first hour of extra-uterine life, before it knew pain or hunger, or could awaken by its cries and smiles the tender love that as yet lay sleeping in the mother's heart!

Life was so full of hardships and dangers that the average expectation was low. The young might laugh and play their innocent games, but the days passed quickly and the Great Dark was never far remote. Often, as we planned for the months to come, Ikpuck or Icehouse added in a tone of resignation, "If we still live." What lay beyond the Darkness no one knew. Even the legends contradicted one another; one version proclaimed that the dead had their home in the moon, another that they haunted this lower world, though invisible to human eyes. Whatever their fate, it held no promise of joy, no hope of reunion with kinsmen who had gone before. The only pleasures were here and now, and the wise man grasped them before they passed from his reach for ever. Death, when it beckoned, he faced with equanimity; if it

29: Jenness E-5 (1914-1916) 1959
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the past, and a new mechanical age has brought magazine rifles, shotguns, steel traps, and even gasolene engines. The caribou are passing with the bows and arrows; of all the herds that once crossed the narrow strait to Victoria Island hardly one now reaches the Arctic shore. Strange diseases are making their appearance, disease that the old-time Eskimo never heard of and for which he has no name. The stern laws of civilization have descended on the land; no longer is infanticide tolerated, or the blood-feud allowed to run its course. "Furs, furs, more furs," is the white man's cry. "Without furs there is no salvation, no ammunition to shoot the scattered game and satisfy your hungry children." The tribal bands where each man toiled for all and shared his food in common are resolving into their constituent families, and every family vies with the rest in the race for wealth and worldly prosperity.

Whither will it all lead? Fifty years ago the cyclone swept over the Eskimos of the Mackenzie River delta, and of its two thousand inhabitants a scant two hundred survive. Fifty years earlier it struck Baffin Island with a similar result. Will history, fifty years hence, record the same fate for this twilight land where for two years we carried on our mission? Were we the harbingers of a brighter dawn, or only messengers of ill-omen, portending disaster?